As Time Goes By

History, Memory, and Sentimentality

Radcliffe Bailey

Sadie Benning

Felix Gonzalez-Torres

Charles LeDray

Pepón Osorio

Jack Pierson

Leslie Thornton

Kim Yasuda

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History, Memory, and Sentimentality

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Felix Gonzalez-Torres
Untitled (Me and My Sister), 1988

Introduction

"As Time Goes By: History, Memory, and Sentimentality" brings together works by eight artists that engage what might be called the aesthetic of sentimentality—an aesthetic characterized by an emotionalism that evokes nostalgic, romantic, or melancholic feelings in the viewer. Sentimental romance novels and melodramatic Hollywood films may be two of the most common modes of such expression in our culture. But instead of considering it simply in terms of a genre, this exhibition addresses sentimentalism's capacity to draw upon empathy and emotion to provoke a critical examination of the inextricable links between intimate memories and collective histories. "As Time Goes By," in other words, is not a survey of sentimental art production. Rather, it builds on recent scholarly and theoretical studies to present art works that introduce multiple nuances operating within sentimentalism.

Some of the artists in "As Time Goes By" complicate cliché representations of romantic desire, childhood innocence, and melancholic yearning either through campy exaggeration or parodic imitation. In doing so, they reveal the conventionality of such "universal" sentiments. Other artists incorporate souvenirs, everyday keepsakes, personal mementos, and intimate accounts to construct scenic narratives that provoke viewers' identification. This method of sentimental "storytelling" taps into the psyche of the audience so as to awaken a self-conscious sense of connection between personal experience and socio-political events.

The essays that follow elaborate on the different artistic strategies of Radcliffe Bailey, Sadie Benning, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Charles LeDray, Pepón Osorio, Jack Pierson, Leslie Thornton, and Kim Yasuda in relation to sentimentalism. In particular, Amy Di Pasquale explores

the normative "feminine" gendering of sentimentalism through the works of Benning, LeDray, Osorio, and Pierson. Sandra Jackson, on the other hand, discusses the use of photography and found objects in the works of Bailey and Gonzalez-Torres, which destabilize dominant historical accounts via alternative "personal" narratives. Finally, Susette Min addresses the paradoxical operations of melancholia and mourning through an analysis of works by Gonzalez-Torres, Thornton, and Yasuda.

The aesthetic of sentimentality is an attempt to understand the present through the recovery of the repressed memories and excluded histories that are buried in the past. While sentimentalism is commonly viewed as an emotional indulgence, the artists in "As Time Goes By" invoke a more complex reading of the power of sentimentality to reveal the hidden relationship between personal memory and collective history.

Amy Di Pasquale
Sandra D. Jackson
Susette S. Min

Charles LeDray
My Baby, 1993-96

All That Heaven Allows

Amy Di Pasquale

In the realm of popular culture, sentimentality often calls forth images of the maudlin: soap operas, Hallmark cards, Harlequin romance novels, or "tear jerker" epics like *Gone With the Wind*. Related to these genres are visual representations that set in motion cliché associations and predictable narratives in the minds of the viewer. For example, Scarlett O'Hara's silhouette against the setting sun on her plantation is an iconic image of womanly fortitude following romantic loss. And the elegant image of Jacqueline Kennedy in her pink suit and pillbox hat represents for many Americans a nostalgic vision of the "Camelot" years of the 1960s Kennedy administration.

Typically, sentimentality is treated with derision, stereotypically associated with the "feminine" or relegated to the realm of the cultural lowbrow. But recent feminist scholarship on two eras of sentimental artistic production—the nineteenth-century novel of "sensibility" and the melodramatic films marketed especially for women's consumption in the 1950s, also known as "weepies"—have explored the possibilities for subversive and critical engagement with social issues within these genres. In fact, the melodramatic use of excessive emotion in sentimental narratives is seen to be one of the ways in which socially-dictated conventions, such as gendered hierarchy of family roles, can be challenged. Which is to say, sentimental narratives which often encode ideological prescriptions, like "old-fashioned" family values, can also be a means to undo them. Moreover, exaggeration and excess can be taken in another direction toward camp, in order to parody the prescriptive norms of gender and sexuality that are embedded in sentimental narratives.

Sadie Benning, Jack Pierson, Pepón Osorio, and Charles LeDray all engage "feminine" codes of domesticity

Jack Pierson
Diamond Life 1990

or melodrama, and use found objects and well-worn mementos of "everyday life," to draw the viewer into both personal and collective narratives. While Pierson, Osorio, and LeDray create empty stage sets, mise-en-scènes full of souvenirs and physical traces of absent bodies, Benning collects images of 1950s cult films, matchbox cars, and Barbie dolls to develop a story line of personal romance in her videos.

Pierson culls together the detritus of popular culture to create his drawings, photographs, and installations that are quiet meditations on nostalgia, beauty, and loneliness. He also incorporates cinematic and literary references, along with quotations of old song lyrics, to create various moods and to evoke images of departed lovers and hours spent in reverie. Pierson's installations mimic theatrical mise-en-scènes, spectacles constructed out of private and domestic spaces, through which the viewer can enter into the artist's personal imaginings.

Diamond Life (1990), like the majority of Pierson's installation pieces, is composed of what one critic calls "the idiosyncratic remainders" of human activity. An empty chair, scattered books, an overflowing ashtray, empty coffee mugs, an old postcard pinned to a yellow wall, and a record left out on a turntable—these objects together evoke a departed visceral presence. It is as if viewers happen upon a kitchen table that has been recently deserted after an intimate afternoon of lazy reminiscences, smoking, and listening to old records. Pierson's tableau of loss and abandonment also references cultural nostalgia: the LPs are "oldies" from the 1950s to the 1970s, the stereo upon which viewers are invited to create their own personal soundtrack is a low-fi record player, and the novels on the table are well-worn copies of works by Joan Didion. In fact, one can imagine

this tableau being inhabited by a low-rent Maria Wyeth, the abandoned, ennui-filled, and Seconal-addled Hollywood housewife of Didion's *Play It As It Lays* (1970). The overall sense of detachment—both ironic and temporal that infuses *Diamond Life* and much of Pierson's other work, produces a "distancing" from the cultural relics and sentiments it deploys. We recognize these mementos as being as "common" as they are personal, frozen in a moment from a recognizable past.

The genre of melodramatic cinema is recalled in Pierson's signs composed of "recycled" movie marquee letters, which spell out pleas and proclamations of unrequited love. With their formal allusion to the movie house, his wistful phrases and words, such as "Stay," "The One and Only," "Anyone," and "Toujours," almost sound like titles for "family melodramas" of the 1950s (i.e., Douglas Sirk's *All I Desire*). Other sign pieces, composed of mismatched, worn, and colorful letters, also recall old roadside signs from the (now demolished) Route 66, or Las Vegas in its seedy and glamorous heyday (one piece spells out "Stardust"). Pierson has said: "By presenting certain language clues in my work, people will write the rest of the story, because there is a collective knowledge of clichés and stereotypes that operates." The use of materials infused with pop cultural artifice (in this case, marquee lettering; in others, cut up pictures of movie idols, song lyrics, and old books), gives his work a campy aesthetic. His persistence in utilizing dated images and outmoded artifacts also adds a sense of melancholia to his installations that is at the same time mocking of his "raw" expressions of desire.

Sadie Benning also uses the strategy of juxtaposition. But in her case, the technique of cut-and-paste splicing of old film clips and live footage is combined with an eclectically montaged soundtrack (ranging from Peggy Lee, to Billie Holliday, to Prince) to create a "low-tech" black-and-white video that offers poignant and humorous reflections of a lesbian adolescent. Recorded with a Fisher-Price Pixelvision camera (originally designed as a toy), *It Wasn't Love* (1992) is a fantasy road romance that is a cross

between *Bonnie and Clyde* and a femme fatale saga.

The video is composed of a fractured series of confessional one-liners delivered directly into the camera, beginning with Benning intoning, "Last night, I drove to Hollywood with this chick." The narrative is propelled by such disclosures, syncopated by Benning's campy gender-bending renditions of such popular stereotypes as the gangster, femme fatale, and chanteuse. The intimate, confidential relationship Benning establishes with the viewer through her direct mode of address is enhanced throughout the video by her diaristic approach and the extreme close-ups of the artist's eyes and lips as she relates her tale.

Yet, the authenticity of Benning's sentimental declarations are undercut by their juxtaposition with clips of melodramatic imagery of mythical outlaw chicks (like those in *Thelma and Louise*) and shoot-outs from old gangster movies. At other moments, Benning performs a send-up of Peggy Lee's classic "Fever," singing in exaggerated makeup and posture with a candelabra burning in the background. Later, she sings "Why Must I Be a Teenager In Love?" in male drag, complete with a cigar and goatee. In the end, with the violins surging, we are told our heroines never made it to Hollywood after all, as they find themselves necking in the parking lot of a nearby fried chicken joint.

Sadie Benning
Still from *It Wasn't Love*, 1992

It Wasn't Love hijacks Hollywood conventions to replace the standard heterosexual film duo with Benning's outlaw "bad girls." Benning's diaristic approach, as well as her citation of popular media imagery, highlights the invisibility of gay and lesbian characters in mainstream depictions of both "coming-of-age" and romantic narratives. At the same time, *It Wasn't Love* blurs the distinction between romantic sincerity and knowingly coy camp, pointing to the ways in which our heartfelt sentiments of love and romance are always already mediated—literally.

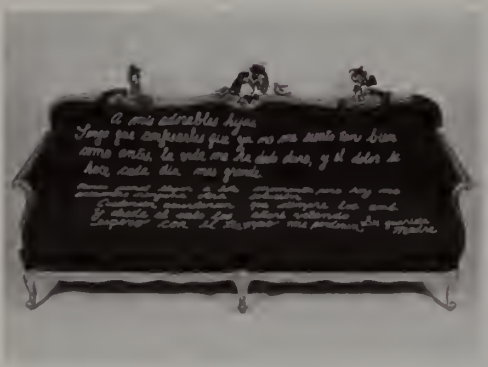
Charles LeDray's miniature, handmade artworks have been described as "homey," "obsessive," and "gender-bending," because his primary modes of production, sewing and hand-crafting, are typically thought of as "women's work." *Milk and Honey* (1994-96), for example, is composed of 2,000 hand-crafted miniature bowls, vases, and urns, in styles ranging from classical Greek to 1950s biomorphism. Displayed in a glass vitrine, the vessels call forth memories of childhood, with their formal similarity to dollhouse furniture and miniature tea sets. Similarly, *My Baby* (1993-96) consists of an elaborate lace-covered white wicker bassinet, veiled in white tulle and cradling baby clothes, below which rests the miniature accouterments of its creation, including spools of thread, scissors, and knitting needles. Rather than using found objects, LeDray creates meticulously confected simulacrum. The entire piece, from the scissors to the baby clothes to the bassinet itself, were handmade by LeDray over a four-year period. Working within these "feminine" handicrafts and maternal imagery, LeDray plays with prescribed gender roles. Here, the reference to maternity is coupled with a sense of dread, since the crib in *My Baby* is inhabited only by a featureless lace effigy. Thus, the evocation of sentimental attachment to childhood and infancy is coupled with anxiety and fear of loss.

Charles LeDray
Milk and Honey, 1994-96
(detail)

Pepón Osorio also works with themes and imagery that operate within the traditionally "cozy" realm of the domestic sphere, using trinkets and abundantly-decorated household objects as conduits for larger social narratives. Beginning with what he calls the "collection of emotions," Osorio often uses lush and lavish installations or sculptures

to tell a paradoxically bleak tale. For instance, in his *100% Boricua* (1991), a curiosity cabinet is filled with souvenir chotchkes of New York City, such as miniature replicas of the Statue of Liberty (topped by a Puerto Rican flag) and other tourist images. The playful and kitschy collection, however, is undercut with statistics on police brutality against the Hispanic community.

In *A mis adorables hijas (To My Darling Daughters)* (1990), Osorio addresses "individual suffering in the light of collective tragedy." The piece is composed of a purple velvet couch trimmed in gold, across which is inscribed a suicide note from a mother to her daughters. *A mis adorables hijas* was originally created as part of a set for a performance piece called *Broken Hearts* (1990), which dealt with the issue of fragmentation and loss of cultural stability brought on by the forced migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States under "Operation Bootstrap." *A mis adorables hijas* explores the attendant issue of the high percentage of Puerto Rican women working as heads of households under conditions of poverty. In *A mis adorables hijas* the sumptuous decoration of the velvet couch, which Osorio found on the street and had reupholstered, is contrasted with the bleak conditions of despair which are described in golden words scrawled across its surface:



Pepón Osorio
A mis adorables hijas (To My Darling Daughters)
1990

> To my darling daughters, I have to confess that I'm not feeling as good as I used to, life has been hard and the pain gets greater every day. Never thought to reach this point but cannot find any other solution. Take care of yourselves and remember that I have always loved you and from above I'll be watching. I hope with time you forgive me. Your dear mother.

Around the border of the couch, Osorio places further reminders of the absent woman. Plastic saints, braids of hair, lottery tickets, and thimbles are glued in clusters around the gilded edges of the purple couch, creating a sort of domestic reliquary for the deceased mother. The purple color can also be seen as a reference to San Lazaro, who is always linked with that color in Afro-Caribbean religion and whose lesion-covered body references sickness and suffering. In this way, Osorio transforms an opulent domestic space, traditionally a site of comfort, into a scene of dramatic personal and historical tragedy.

The artists in "As Time Goes By" create empathetic scenes with which the viewers can identify. Jack Pierson's use of mementos from everyday life and the romantic language of old Hollywood cinema activate a sense of nostalgia and desire. At the same time, however, the exaggerated and "knowing" artifice of his constructions renders them campy and parodic commentaries on the very emotions that they conjure up. Similarly, Sadie Benning employs a toy camera to create a personal testimony of a lesbian coming-of-age that is both singular and familiar, thoroughly informed by the stereotypes of Hollywood movies and the clichés of popular music and the mass media. Pepón Osorio takes sentimental objects, ordinary keepsakes and trinkets, and compiles them into emotional statements about collective social identity. Charles LeDray plays with traditional gender roles assumed by the maternal imagery and handcrafted process of his art making. Using familiar images from popular culture and tokens of sentimental attachment from everyday life in these ways, Benning, LeDray, Osorio, and Pierson open up the realm of private memories, desires, and fantasies to address the collective myths of our culture.

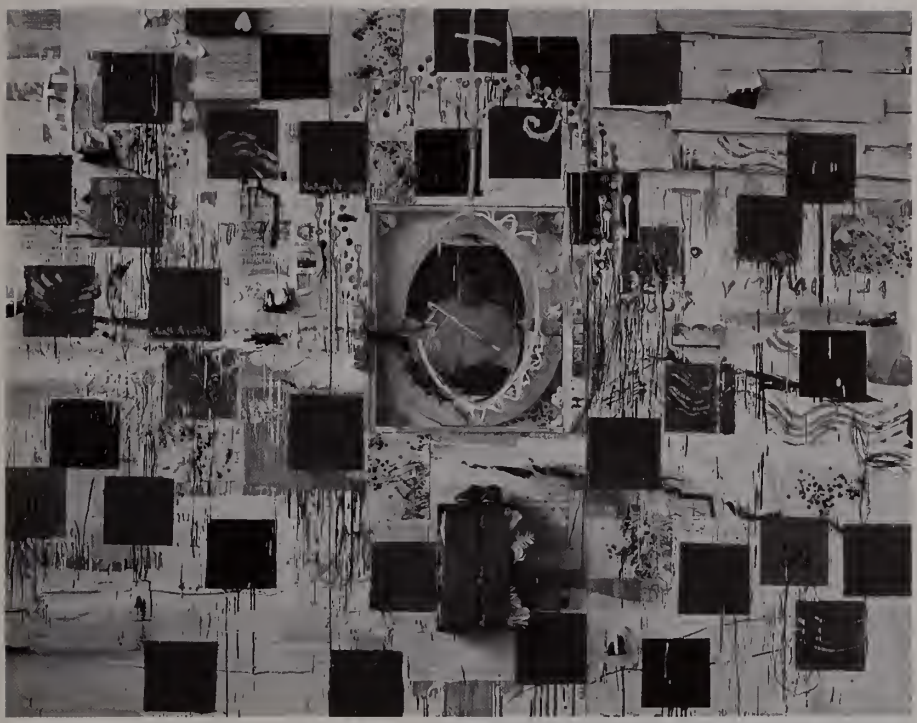
I'll Take You There

Sandra D. Jackson

> You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places....Occasionally the river floods these places. "Floods" is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be....It is emotional memory...
>
> —Toni Morrison

The relationship between personal memory and social history is multi-faceted and complex. Personal memory is usually thought of as particular, partial, and sentimental, whereas history is understood as an official account of select events that speak of a generalized whole of humanity. These two renderings of life are often confined to separate categories of discourse because of the subjective/objective characterization of individual experience and "textbook" history respectively. But despite the appearance to the contrary, these seemingly opposed modes of chronicling life are fully imbricated within one another. And sentimentalism can serve as a means to engage this convergence of official history and personal memory.

Capitalizing on the emotional connections that viewers can potentially have to sentimental objects such as old photographs, childhood toys, worn clothing, and other cultural "debris," Radcliffe Bailey and Felix Gonzalez-Torres seduce the audience into constructing their own narratives around these objects. Both artists understand that sentimental objects are imbued with not only personal associations and values but historical references and social meanings. Consequently, the objects have the power to mediate a relationship between public and private recollections that, in turn, affirms the narrator's individual experience as historically valid and meaningful. Which is to say,



Radcliffe Bailey
Soular Taps, 1995

storytelling via sentimental objects is an act of transferring memory into the realm of history. And such storytelling is an essential means to recover lost or repressed histories, augmenting those missing from the official archives and offering a critique of dominant narratives of historical evidence and knowledge.

Radcliffe Bailey politicizes nostalgic sentimentalism. In *Soular Taps* (1995), multivalent layers of paint and memorabilia swaddle the surface of a rectangular construction. In the center of this patchwork quilt-like collage is a photograph of an African-American child, beneath which is a pair of toddler tap dance shoes propped on top of a wooden box. Stuffed with feathers, this box specifically references the torture of being tarred and feathered and more generally recalls the legacy of slavery in this country. Similarly, pages from a church hymnal, which cover the picture plane, are set off by painted paper squares branded with the pattern of an African adinkra symbol (fashioned from contemporary

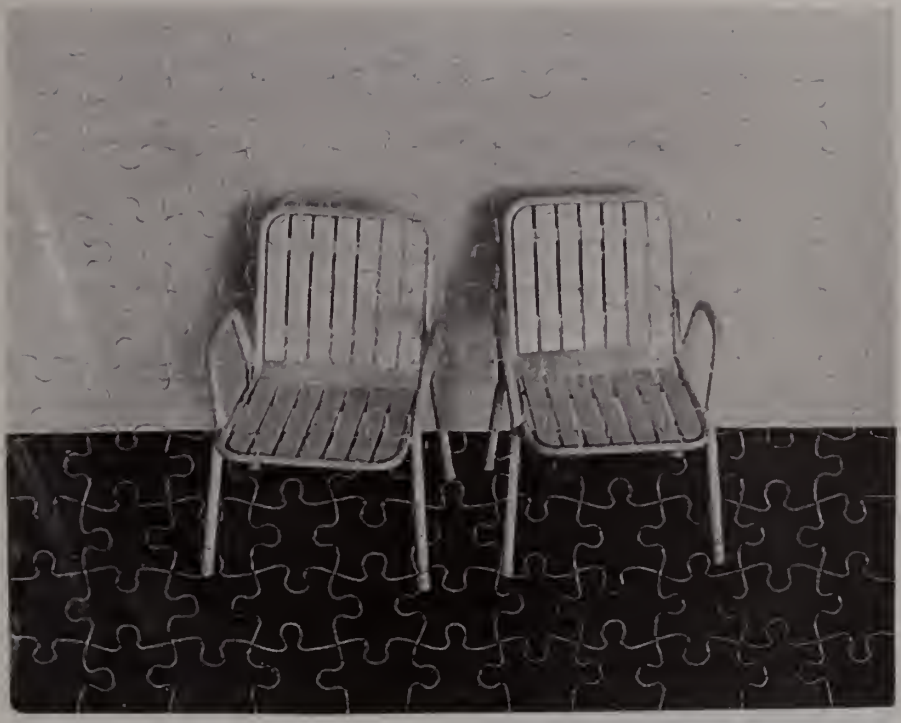
burglar prevention bars). With this gesture, Bailey simultaneously points to an African oral tradition—lyrical Negro spirituals—and the branding of enslaved Africans.

In calling attention to some of the discomforting truths of American history, Bailey serves as a visual orator of the African diaspora, engaging the viewer in a cultural retrieval that touches on themes ranging from slavery and African religious practices to personal histories. *Soular Taps* is a ritual tap dancing of souls through history and memory, each colored square memorializing the place where spirits rest—a place of affirmation, grounding, and consistent rhythmic movement through time both past and present.

Radcliffe Bailey
Shango, 1993

In contrast, Bailey's *Shango* (1993)—composed of wood scraps from burnt buildings, pieces of wallpaper gathered from the interior of old dilapidated houses, and covered in burnt-umber shellac—appears stark, gloomy, and deeply melancholic. Constructed in the shape of an oversized birdhouse (in honor of the artist's grandfather), the altar-like *Shango* is embellished with vintage family photographs, beeswax, dried flowers retrieved from grave yards, and golden foot prints. The collage is topped by a double-headed ax that references Shango, the Yoruba deity of thunder, lightning, and force. Bailey's evocation of this symbol of Africa is a form of ancestral homage linking his own identity as an African American to its African origins. At the same time, the piece is a humble relic to be treasured by future generations of his family.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres' series of puzzle pieces entertains the idea of travel as a metaphor for memory, linking the act of remembering to voyages. And ever present is the notion of reuniting separated parts. In *Untitled (Future)* (1991) and *Untitled (Paris, Last Time)* (1989), black-and-white photographs of sentimental moments of intimacy—



Felix Gonzalez-Torres
Untitled (Paris, Last Time), 1989

adolescent boys in army fatigues casually posing for a snapshot; a pair of white lawn chairs left empty against a wall—are made into jigsaw puzzles that are tentatively held together by a clear plastic bag, referencing the ephemerality of history and memory. This ephemerality is further emphasized by the very nature of photographs which at once give evidence of the past while signaling its irretrievability.

The overwhelming sense of absence in *Untitled (Paris, Last Time)* (1989) creates a longing for the bodies that once occupied the empty chairs and provokes a curiosity about the possible narratives that might underlie the scene. The parenthetical portion of the title offers a framework for a possible narrative, but rather than informing the viewer of a particular time and place, it registers instead an ambiguity that reenforces a sense of loss. For instance, is the "last time" pointing to a previous time?—a reminiscence of an affectionate moment once shared with a friend or a lover? Or does the "last time" mark a finality of some kind, the

permanent loss of a loved one?

Lost love may be the theme of *Untitled (Future)* (1991) also, which pictures young boys posing as soldiers, arm in arm, revealing a kind of close-ness and camaraderie rarely seen in mainstream representations of male friendship. Of course, this friendship may actually be homosexual love, but this is left vague in Gonzalez-Torres' work. This vagueness, however, pressures the strict separation between homosocial and homosexual desire, and in this sense, images of love and loss by Gonzalez-Torres resonate with political importance as well. For example, *Untitled (Future)* subtly evokes the issue of gays in the military, and *Untitled (Paris, Last Time)* quietly echoes the profound sense of loss experienced personally and communally as a result of the AIDS crisis.

Bailey and Gonzalez-Torres both piece together fragmentary tokens of memory and emotions to affirm marginalized histories. They embark on journeys that traverse space and time in order to take us to places that bring the past into the historical present. Walter Benjamin has said, "there was a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed...a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply." Revisiting places conjured by fragrances, particular imagery, or souvenirs, the work of Bailey and Gonzalez-Torres, like the Mississippi River, "floods" history's shores with memories awaiting recognition.

Melancholic Musings

Susette S. Min

The works in "As Time Goes By" highlight the sentimental attachment and value we place on unremarkable objects and ordinary occurrences in everyday life. More specifically, Kim Yasuda's installation *resuscitate* (1997), Felix Gonzalez-Torres' sculpture *Untitled (Portrait of Dad)* (1991), and Leslie Thornton's video *The Last Time I Saw Ron* (1994) explore these sentimental attachments in relation to mourning and melancholia as they become intensified after the loss of a loved one.

Kim Yasuda
resuscitate, 1997 (detail)

Mourning can be seen as a survival tactic which allows one to overcome or break free from the attachments and memories of the lost object. Melancholia, by contrast, is a compensatory response which allows one to avert or postpone complete acceptance of the loss through a kind of identification process. According to theorist Judith Butler, this process of "incorporation" can be described as one in which aspects of the lost object (a friend, a lover, a child, a parent, etc.) are internalized by the grieving subject, taken up as parts of him/herself. Despite their differences, however, mourning and melancholia are co-dependent terms. For even after a "proper" mourning, the sense of self may be fully infected by the residues and memories of the lost object. Conversely, to grieve another person's passing may be to grieve oneself. As some works in "As Time Goes By" reveal, the story of grief and the complex psychological relationship between melancholia and mourning may never

really have a beginning or an end.

The collection of objects in Kim Yasuda's site-specific installation, *resuscitate*, are surrogates of her recently deceased father, which collectively transform a portion of the gallery into a space to negotiate unresolved grievances and unfulfilled dreams. Yasuda collapses time, space, and identity by mapping her father's daily activities and his unrealized desires on top of her own experience of loss and longing. In a sense, she becomes her own father and embodies his wishes as her own—a process of melancholic incorporation. The distillation and reconfiguration of her father's sundry belongings—a soiled handkerchief suspended in clear plastic, his clothing made into an archive of pillows, carpets reconfigured into a topographical map of the Grand Canyon, pages of his private writings and inventions recycled and "published" as a sheet of handmade paper, and his shavings saved like a laboratory culture—become a landscape of loss and desire.

Yasuda's obsession to preserve her father by overinvesting in his mundane possessions reveals a self-indulgence associated with melancholia. As she pathetically attempts to retain her father's essence by reconstituting the function of everyday objects, she internalizes her loss and enacts a postponement of its full recognition. At the same time, Yasuda challenges the foreclosure of the possibility of her father's dreams and desires. The topographic map of the Grand Canyon, for example, is a place where he always wanted to go but never did; and the public display of his unpublished ideas and inventions suggests an open-endedness to his unlived desires. *resuscitate* is also an attempt to elevate the banal and unspectacular reality of the everyday into the realm of the sublime. The acoustic ceiling of her father's suburban home, which was his final view, is translated into a glittery constellation of limitless boundaries and possibilities, transforming the installation into a fantastical terrain of unrequited desires on the part of

Kim Yasuda
resuscitate 1997 (detail)

Felix Gonzalez-Torres
Untitled (Portrait of Dad), 1991

the artist and her father.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres' *Untitled (Portrait of Dad)* is a pile of 175 pounds (the weight of the artist's father) of candy mints strategically situated at the corner of the gallery. The corner provides the backbone, while the accumulative weight of the candy gives the work its pyramid-like shape. The unassuming simplicity of the candy spill invites the viewer to contemplate the piece and its artistic function, challenging the traditional definitions of art and the aura of portraiture.

At another level, *Untitled (Portrait of Dad)* simultaneously demonstrates the process of melancholic incorporation and proposes it as a collective rather than a personal act. The brightly wrapped savory sweets is meant to be taken and eaten by the viewers. In this "interactive" procedure, the observer not only imperceptibly alters the sculpture, s/he also literally incorporates the "body" of the father by ingesting the candy. The accumulation of sweets, the caloric

Leslie Thorton
Still from *The Last Time I Saw Ron*, 1994

intake of sugar, the departure of the observer, and the daily replenishment of the candy pile to 175 pounds according to Gonzalez-Torres' installation instructions prevent the permanent closure to the loss of his father.

Leslie Thornton's video *The Last Time I Saw Ron* is an eloquent meditative elegy to her close friend Ron Vawter, a performance artist best-known for his work with the avant-garde theater troupe the Wooster Group, who died of AIDS in 1993. The video is a fragmentary montage narrative bringing together disparate scenes from Vawter's last performance of *Philoktetes Variations* in Belgium. These scenes are intermixed with chaotic and sublime filmic sequences from early Hollywood disaster films, old French film footage, and images of nature's destructive force. Collapsing time and space, switching from black-and-white to color, Thornton cuts back and forth through psychic and social topographies with striking images: Icarus-like bodies flying through cosmic space, a naked man in a fetal position disappearing towards an eclipse, a pair of bare legs stained with kaposi sarcoma.

The first montage sequence is of Vawter at a photo shoot to promote his performance as the mythical Greek warrior, Philoktetes. He looks distracted as Sophocles' hero, the inheritor of Hercules' poisonous bow and arrow. In the scene, as Philoktetes is banished to the desolate island of Lemnos under Odysseus' orders, the audience learns through Thornton's voice-over and the camera's scan of his legs that Vawter himself is dying of AIDS. Blurring the line between fact and fiction, the video is in part a rehearsal of Vawter's death, an aggressive acting out of the inability to grieve

those with AIDS, and a commemoration of a man who believed in the power of art. Throughout the video, a poignant tension is sustained between Thornton's personal endeavor to remember a close friend and her critical film techniques that destabilize her own authoritative gaze.

By juxtaposing lyrical scenes, such as turning tides, time-lapse photography of sunsets, and thawing of bare branches, with a montage of "disaster" images, such as exploding movie sets, collapsing buildings, and uprooting of trees during a storm, Thornton visually articulates the rage and pain of loss as well as the inability to fully express that loss. Thornton draws the viewers in by deploying empathetic codes and information (sublime music, haunting black-and-white images, knowledge that Vawter has already passed away). But at the same time, she abruptly disallows entry into the narrative (through asynchronistic sound and images, disjunctive temporal realities, and floating voice-overs) in order to place distance between the viewer and her mourning of a dear friend. She undermines sentimentalism's power to provoke empathy by denying identification, even for herself.

The works of Yasuda, Gonzalez-Torres, and Thornton complicate the relationship of mourning and melancholia to sentimental objects and images. As their works open up new possibilities for understanding grief as an unending story, they also allow for a reconsideration of the normative processes in which our sense of self and subjectivity are maintained.

Works in the Exhibition

Jack Pierson *Stay*, 1991

Radcliffe Bailey (b. 1968)
Shango, 1993
Mixed media, 95 x 93 x 4
Collection of Fay and Donald Gold

Soular Taps, 1995
Mixed media on wood, 96 x 120 x 12
Collection of Livia and Marc Straus

Sadie Benning (b. 1973)
It Wasn't Love, 1992
Videotape, black-and-white, sound, 20 minutes
Lent by the artist, distributed by Video Data Bank, Chicago

Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1958-1996)
Untitled, 1988
C-print jigsaw puzzle in plastic bag, 7 7/8 x 9 7/8
Collection of Emily Fisher Landau

Untitled (Me and My Sister), 1988
C-print jigsaw puzzle in plastic bag, 7 7/8 x 9 7/8
Collection of Emily Fisher Landau

Untitled (Love Letter from the War Front), 1988
C-print jigsaw puzzle in plastic bag, 7 7/8 x 9 7/8
Collection of Emily Fisher Landau

Untitled (Paris, Last Time), 1989
C-print jigsaw puzzle in plastic bag, 7 1/2 x 9 1/2
Collection of Eileen and Peter Norton

Untitled (Future), 1991
C-print jigsaw puzzle in plastic bag, 7 1/2 x 9 1/2
Collection of Eileen and Peter Norton

Untitled (Portrait of Dad), 1991
Cellophane-wrapped white candies, endless supply, ideal weight 175 pounds
Dimensions variable
Collection of Carlos and Rosa de la Cruz

Charles LeDray (b. 1960)

My Baby, 1993-96
Fabric, thread, yarn, reed, cane, wire, metal, wood, white stoneware, paint, glass, and plastic, 46 1/2 x 27 x 22 overall
Collection of Livia and Marc Straus

Milk and Honey, 1994-96
2,000 porcelain objects, glass, and wood, 77 x 30 x 30 overall
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Purchase, with funds from the Contemporary Painting and Sculpture Committee 96.75

Pepón Osorio (b. 1955)

A mis adorables hijas (To My Darling Daughters), 1990
Mixed media, 36 x 74 x 28
Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

Jack Pierson (b. 1960)

Diamond Life, 1990
Mixed media, 96 x 72 x 48
Collection of Barbara and Howard Morse

Stay, 1991
Plastic and metal letters
Dimensions variable
Collection of Barbara and Howard Morse

(I really don't know clouds) at all, 1993
Ektacolor print mounted on paperboard, 30 1/4 x 29 15/16
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Purchase, with funds from Anne and Joel Ehrenkranz 93.22

Leslie Thorton (b. 1951)

The Last Time I Saw Ron, 1994
Videotape, color, sound; 12 minutes
Lent by the artist; distributed by Video Data Bank, Chicago; Light Cone, Paris

Kim Yasuda (b. 1960)

resuscitate, 1997
Mixed media installation
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

* As of May 19, 1997
Dimensions are in inches; height precedes width precedes depth.

Whitney Museum of American Art at Champion
One Champion Plaza, Atlantic Street at Tresser Boulevard
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Inside Cover
Charles LeDray, *Milk and Honey*, 1994-96 (detail)

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